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## **A fairytale narrative for community sport? Exploring the politics of sport social enterprise**

With voluntary sports clubs operating within competitive leisure markets and local governments responding to austerity by transferring sport 'assets' to community groups, such organisations are encouraged to become social enterprises. Driven by 'can do' social entrepreneurs embracing 'Robin Hood' business models that take from affluent groups to subsidise the disadvantaged, they apparently deliver innovative solutions to deep-rooted social problems. Such fairytale narratives (Ziegler, 2009) are increasingly popular in Scotland with its culture of humanist values (Roy et al, 2015) and reputation as a 'happening place' for social policy innovation (Mooney & Poole, 2004). Using case study material from an award-winning football social enterprise, this paper outlines how time spent in the deprived community establishing local needs and ownership aided its success. Also, recruiting local youth workers, developing authentic partnerships, creating a safe and non-judgemental environment, and the leadership team's business acumen and social compassion combined to create a positive 'ripple effect' beyond that possible from class-blind sport provision (Coalter, 2013). However, 'win win' social enterprise rhetoric ignores stresses caused from meeting loan repayments and the moral dilemmas from inevitable trade-offs between social and business goals. The organisation's 'non-establishment' nature is partially undermined by emphasising local poverty of aspiration and the psychological thinking within Dweck's 'Growth Mindset' and Duckworth's 'Grit' research. The resulting focus on individual effort and learning from failure chimes with neoliberal establishment thinking (Jones, 2014), ignoring how widening societal inequality and politics causes local problems and the need for structural changes to deliver wider social impact.

**Key words:** social enterprise; football; education; politics; youth work

### **Introduction**

An interesting development in community sport is the emergence of social enterprise as a possible contributor to sustainable practice. The Sports Marketing Network encourage sport organisations to use social enterprise to deliver improvements in people's lives, especially the disadvantaged, in line with government thinking that no longer sees policy success merely in terms of increased numbers of sport club participants. Social enterprise intermediaries stress the limited public awareness of how some sports are driven forward by 'inventive social enterprise businesses' that combine profitable business models with a 'sport for development' approach to deliver social impact (Thorp, 2015a&b). With many traditional sport clubs struggling to adjust to changing societal trends and facing closure, embracing social enterprise will, according to the Sports Marketing Network, connect them to people's changing lifestyles and make them more vibrant, visible and viable. However, as Ratten (2010) comments, while many sports organisations are shifting their business model to include social responsibility aspects, this 'bottom up' process needs 'authentically integrated into an organisation' (p.489) through senior practitioner commitment and constructing an environment sympathetic to collaboration. Some see sport clubs as 'accidental social enterprises' as, while having a social mission and trading functions, they lack an explicit strategic and organisational intent to be social 'which may result in ineffective or even negative social outcomes' (Robertson, 2012, p.7). As the aforementioned author argues, while sports organisations deliver considerable social benefits from their 'sports provision orientated social mission' the delivery by volunteers, sporting emphasis, and concern with year-to-year financial viability limits their social

outlook which would be enhanced by social enterprise thinking. However, this paper critically examines whether such thinking facilitates a social outlook or limits it to fit our dominant neoliberalism.

While sport clubs may maintain their sporting focus to avoid becoming instruments of social engineering (Coalter, 2012), some may wish to develop an innovative business model to address local social problems and enhance organisational sustainability. Westerbeek (2010, p.1298) remarks that, ‘there is increasing evidence that a commercial approach to delivering sport (products) to so called lower-chance communities...can bring excellent outcomes for producers and consumers’, and we must not ignore ‘the latent potential of sport as a source of social business ventures...that may solve problems regarding self-sustainability’. However, we must acknowledge the ‘dark side’ of social enterprise (Brandson, 2016) to examine whether its individualizing, quasi-religious optimistic script of harmonious social change without tension (Nicholls & Cho, 2006) deflects from political causes of local problems and structural changes needed for genuine social impact. The paper starts by critically examining social enterprise scholarly literature to highlight tensions submerged within its depoliticizing positive grand narrative (Scott & Teasdale, 2012). To reinforce the ‘critical turn’ within academic literature (Roy, 2016), and overcome the current focus on ‘inspiring examples and anecdotes’ (Tapsell & Woods, 2010), it then uses this framework to discuss empirical research with a community football social enterprise operating in a deprived area of Edinburgh.

### **The Politics of Social Enterprise**

While social enterprise has attracted increased academic attention over the last 15 years, there is no agreement about what it is (Nicholls, 2010). Some adopt a narrow view where not-for-profit (third sector) organisations adopt business-like innovative approaches to community services (Pomerantz, 2003), while others embrace an extended view that it could be key to societal transformation (Alvord et al, 2004; Perrini & Vurro, 2006). The 2008 financial crisis provided an opportunity for those advocating a role for ethical businesses in creating a more sustainable society (Ratten & Babiak, 2010) as, with declining state funding, they champion their ability to address deep-rooted problems in deprived areas more innovatively and efficiently than the public, private or voluntary sector (Nicholls, 2006; Parkinson & Howorth, 2008; Dey & Teasdale, 2013). This is achieved through: a deep appreciation of, and passion for, local people; identifying and boldly acting on opportunities others miss; a relentless process of innovation and learning; creating an appropriate culture; mobilising under-used human, financial and political resources; and integrating stakeholders in governance arrangements (Cho, 2006; Mair & Marti, 2004; Thompson et al, 2000; DTI, 2002). This positive view of social entrepreneurship – viewed as processes taking place within social enterprise organisations - mixes the innovation of business entrepreneurship with a social mission based on ‘local needs rather than on the centralized assumptions of large institutions’ (Seelos & Mair, 2005, p.243) for long-term social impact (Perrini et al, 2010). The focus on business trading and profit distinguishes social enterprises from other social economy organisations that rely on grants and donor support, with profit the vehicle for delivering social impact (Bull, 2008). Social entrepreneurship is deemed an advanced type of entrepreneurship and a ‘necessary reality’ (Sanders & McClellan, 2012) that heightens third sector efficiency and visibility (Kummitha, 2016) and attracts government interest due to their ability, through deep local connections, to reach disadvantaged groups while reducing state funding (Thompson et al (2015). The dominant narrative of social entrepreneurship often revolves around hero (male) social entrepreneurs (Nicholls & Cho, 2006) who are portrayed as ‘unsung heroes

and alchemists with magical qualities' who 'build things from nothing' (Dees, 2004, p18) via a bottom-up approach to social change (Nicholls, 2010). In his seminal work *Leadbetter* (1997, p.2) talked of a welfare system being 'unable to respond effectively to...joblessness, drugs, alcoholism, family break-up and illiteracy', with the solution being an active, problem-solving welfare system'. This required social innovation with social entrepreneurs key given their ambition and ability to 'identify under-utilised resources – people, buildings, equipment – and find ways of putting them to use to satisfy unmet social needs' (p.2). Social entrepreneurs are thus social sector 'change agents' who network with resource holders (Alvord et al, 2004) and who, rather than merely 'doing a job', 'find and embrace a cause and it becomes everything to them'; a process enabled by 'strong spiritual and social elements' (Thompson, 2008, p.159).

However, while positive stories from 'silver bullet' social enterprises make discussion about limitations and failure difficult (Ziegler, 2009), exposing these 'silent narratives' counter the sector's depoliticizing grand narrative: its 'image of goodness' (Scott & Teasdale, 2012) and one-sided quasi-religious 'individualised messianic script incorporating a model of harmonious social change' (Nicholls & Cho, 2006, p.87). Key to this is a critical examination of values behind the 'social' unexamined in earlier academic work centred on social enterprise definitions (Cho, 2006; Teasdale et al, 2013). Relying on social entrepreneur's 'subject-centred' vision of social change and their interventions ignores 'conflicts intrinsic to social existence that render social enterprise an inherently political enterprise...not easily reconcilable via communicative action' (Cho, 2006, p.42). As the aforementioned author remarks, much admired entrepreneurial processes that improve some lives within disadvantaged communities deflect from 'social processes and strategies' better placed to 'achieve discursively negotiated common objectives' (p.47). In addressing youth crime or poor educational attainment, 'can do' social entrepreneurs may encourage civil society's ignorance of why these problems occur, leaving them responsible for addressing symptoms of macro political problems through 'cosmetically satisfying solutions' that discourage discussion about the role of social inequality and cultural marginalisation and the structural reforms needed to promote self-development for the whole community (Cho, 2006, p.51). This point is mirrored by Hayhurst (2014, p.298) who, in highlighting the high praise and responsibility given to 'the girl' in a prominent sport and international development programme, stresses how the focus of their social entrepreneurship can 'overlook the broader structural inequalities and gender relations that marginalize girls in the first place'. As the aforementioned author comments, positive descriptions of social entrepreneurs as 'change agents' deflects from their position within neoliberal governance regimes which sees responsibility for social problems shift from the state to 'the power within' unpaid women, compounding their disadvantaged position and enabling development 'on the cheap'. Dominant managerial views of social enterprise and the social thus 'oversimplify reality...by concealing the ambivalences and dilemmas associated with their day-to-day practices' (Dey & Teasdale, 2013, p.250).

The belief in social entrepreneurs' ability to address social problems began in the 1990s with New Labour's election and developed through business schools, think tanks, funders and social enterprise support organisations who linked them to the fashionable concept of social capital (Dey, 2010). As Grenier (2009, p.177) remarks this would 'influence how practitioners and policy-makers think..., and constrain what is done in practice and policy'. This interaction between organisations restricted the conceptualization of social entrepreneurship to 'hero entrepreneurs' (Nicholls & Young, 2008) and a managerial view of community service provision over community concerns (Dey, 2010). As Parkinson & Howorth (2008, p.291) argued, attention shifted from 'complex values and meanings behind the social' through a change in thinking from 'political engagement to problem

fixing, collective action to individual entrepreneurs, and from democratic structures to a focus on social purpose'. Dey & Steyaert (2010, p.92) view this as problematic because 'the promise transmitted by the messiah-like figure of the social entrepreneur makes people believe...they can remain passive and let the do-gooders clean up the mess'. Similarly Cho (2006, p48) comments that 'the sight of self-sustaining community programmes may focus dialogue on the joy of alleviating symptoms rather than on the difficult process of resolving the social pathologies that produced them'. The embrace of valued individual attributes, such as risk taking and innovativeness, means the social entrepreneur 'gets to re-interpret root causes...of social ills not in relation with structural or political terms, but in conjunction with individual categories' (Teasdale, 2013, p.127).

## **Case study: Spartans Community Football Academy**

### **Methods**

To appreciate experiences enhancing life-chances for some requires deeper understanding of mechanisms and causal pathways within social enterprises (Roy et al, 2014) which are 'mainly assumed rather than theoretically and empirically examined' (Perrini et al, 2010, p.464). The research was located within an interpretivist paradigm to explore how practitioners made sense of their social worlds (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Neuman, 2000), with a case study approach chosen for its ability to assess contemporary issues within a real life context (Yin, 2003). A holistic-inductive qualitative design was key to uncovering a deeper appreciation of entrepreneurship processes – from the environment, from individuals, and their interaction - as its flexibility allowed questions to shift in light of observations and numerous discussions with the organisation's practitioners (Dana & Dana, 2005). As the aforementioned authors remark, within this evolving design 'the effective researcher is inspired by investigating processes, interactions and context, never taking for granted the meanings of words, concepts or behaviour' (p.86). To address this the author conducted a qualitative case study involving face-to-face interviews, lasting between 45 minutes and 90 minutes, with Academy staff (6), local headteachers (3), teacher (1) funders (2) and others within the social enterprise community (5). Interviews were undertaken in locations convenient to the interviewees between February 2013 and November 2016. They examined factors underpinning the organisation's success and tensions and trade-offs evident in meeting social and business objectives. Data was extended by analysing the organisation's website, written reports, and social media output. Sampling was purposeful in that it sought to capture an organisation often described as the best Scottish example of a sport social enterprise but one that, from my observations, highlighted interesting tensions between underlying philosophy and critical social enterprise and 'sport for development' literature. Interviews were recorded and transcribed in full with data analysis involving repeated reading of transcriptions, with the aforementioned literature in mind, to identify patterns, similarities and differences (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Mason, 1996; Marvasti, 2004). It embraced a recursive and iterative approach where data collection and analysis occurred simultaneously, each informing the other (Blaikie, 2000; Bryman, 2001).

### **Background**

Spartans FC was set up in 1951 by Edinburgh University students as a vehicle for maintaining contact after completing their studies. They play in the Scottish Lowland League and have obtained considerable success: notably in 2014-15 when reaching the fifth round of the Scottish Cup – the professional game's premier cup competition. Senior management felt they 'fell into' being a social enterprise as it became obvious that their

original City Park ground was a ‘funny size and shape and, to get a sustainable business model, we needed more than a pitch used once a week’. Fortuitously, Edinburgh Council required funding to redevelop the Royal Commonwealth Pool to host the diving event of Glasgow’s 2014 Commonwealth Games, and the ground’s sale became part of the funding package. From its £7 million sale Spartans received £1 million from the council and an 80 year lease. Other funders were Miller Homes (£300k), Big Lottery Fund (£560k), sportscotland (£500k), Spartans FC (£225k) and the Robertson Trust (£40k).

The club is located in Pilton, an area epitomizing Edinburgh’s status as the most divided of British cities (McCrone & Elliott’s, 1989). As the chief executive remarked, within a few minutes’ walk of their facility are some of Scotland’s most deprived postcodes, while walk the other way and they are in ‘millionaires row’ and a ‘sea of independent schools’. This made them ‘uniquely placed to promote services to both and it’s right we do’. Pilton is one of Edinburgh’s ‘infamous districts’ of ‘poor and intensely stigmatized peripheral estates’ (Kallin & Slater, 2014). It is stigmatized by images of crime, worklessness, drug and alcohol abuse, with practitioners stating how it was the location for the film *Trainspotting* which portrayed a group of heroin addicts’ attempt to defy society’s expectations for a normal life. Confirming the social enterprise preference for ‘fairytale narratives’ (Ziegler, 2009) the club is organized on a ‘Robin Hood’ business model, where profit generated from commercial trading activities (e.g. holiday programmes, after school coaching initiatives, pitch hire, birthday packages, ‘nursery nutmegs’ and an over 35 league) subsidises development work with local deprived children. While the club always linked with these groups – they previously received profits from match-day programme sales - the Academy was formed in 2006 to create a community football club so woven into the community fabric that any attempted closure would cause local uproar. Rather than being locked into one sector Spartans’ management addressed the legal structure challenge facing hybrid organisations by setting up as a company limited by guarantee, a registered charity and social enterprise. The separate trading company allowed the reclaiming of VAT with all year end profits transferred to the charity.

### **Leadership Team**

Highlighting how social entrepreneurs’ compassion stems from early life experiences (Barendsen & Gardner, 2004), the chief executive’s upbringing in a deprived local housing scheme – known as ‘the banana flats’ - and his parents’ working class values of hard work and fairness gave him a deep connection to the area and its inhabitants. He felt his football abilities ‘saved me, made me a cool kid’ and prevented bullying which gave him early evidence of the ‘power of sport’. These factors combined with over 20 years’ project management, leadership and team building experience within a leading financial institution to feed his ‘can do’ mindset. Social enterprises are described as hybrid organisations (Mullins et al, 2012; Smith et al, 2013) because of their focus on social and business goals. Many interviewees stressed that it was uncommon to find these values embodied in one person and it was key to the organisation’s success. A funding representative stressed how they ‘bought into the person’ who had the leadership skills and passion to gather stakeholders and thus encourage sustainability. The chief executive took voluntary redundancy from the financial institution to see more of his children and spend time on his other role as head coach of Edinburgh University’s football team. Given his background and reputation as a known community networker he was approached by Spartans’ management to become their business development manager and, subsequently, chief executive. These fortuitous personal circumstances gave him 18 months to spend in the community identifying needs and developing ownership. While Spartans has an adult,

youth and Academy section the chief executive straddles all three ensuring consistency of ethos and core values encompassing integrity, openness, respect, reliability and honouring uniqueness.

The chief executive's background as a former professional footballer and 'boss' of the organisation gave him the cultural capital to connect to a local gang leader facing jail for a serious assault. The desire to support someone described as a local 'cultural architect' stemmed again from the practitioner's early life history because, as he remarked, 'I grew up in a council block and understand that 'he's the man' so when the next wave comes he can't walk away'. It also stemmed from a family member's perception that the individual 'was not bad, just misunderstood'. The gang leader was offered a full-time job if he volunteered a few hours a week for eight weeks. Having undertaken this, his employment made it cool to volunteer and, as the chief executive remarked, 'within a month all his gang wanted to volunteer and we turned the hardest group into bluecoats'. The latter sought to produce initial smiles from local youngsters, replicating the chief executive's experiences of 'redcoat' entertainers during childhood Butlins' holidays. However, as Blackshaw & Crabbe (2004) argue 'while empathetic and non judgemental of the social outcasts they engage, part of the attraction of these forms of community sports work to the mainstream is their lack of any ideological critique of the consumerism which contributes to the ghettoisation' (p.144). This is encouraged by being, as one staff member remarked, 'about doing it rather than theory'.

Another key individual is the organisation's chairman who combined a family background in teaching - giving him a 'natural default position to help others' - with employment in KPMG which provided business development expertise. The Spartans' leadership team epitomized Leadbetter's (1997, p27) description of social entrepreneurs as those who 'mobilise people to tackle social problems collaboratively. They are caring and compassionate but professional and business-like. They set high expectations and standards. They demand a lot of their users and clients. They bridge the gap between the private and public sectors, the state and the market, to develop effective and efficient solutions to our most complex and pressing social problems'. Key to this was distancing themselves from 'grant dependent' third sector organisations because, as the chief executive remarked, 'we are a social business and I am a businessman. Profit is the magic dust that creates the dividend of social impact'.

### **Youth Work Approach**

According to Blackshaw & Long (2005, p.251) long-established voluntary sports clubs have a limited role in the lives of disadvantaged as they are often 'inward-looking, conservative and overly concerned with themselves'. Drawing on the sociology of Bourdieu (1984) and Sennett & Cobb (1973) they highlight how 'enduring conditions of poverty' (p.255) can be addressed by cultural intermediaries with 'cool respect' in communities developing positive communications and trusted relationships with disadvantaged individuals which, in time, delivers new resources and connections encouraging behavior change. Spartans' staff achieved this through their compassionate understanding of local people and ability to 'speak their language'. As highlighted previously (Coalter & Taylor, 2009) key to the 'social' side of this social enterprise was recruiting local people as youth workers. As Kummitha (2016, p.17) argues 'Employees who come from local communities know the culture, language and customers, making it easier...to connect with the communities'. These individuals had overcome significant

childhood problems which provided an appreciation of local youngsters' vulnerability, while showing the latter role models who (crucially) stayed in the community and, with effort, made something of themselves. In line with neoliberal thinking, staff felt that poverty of ambition – as opposed to inequality and social arrangements – was a significant local problem, with young males stealing motorbikes or selling drugs given celebrity status. They aimed to provide an alternative path with youngsters encouraged to 'Dream Big: Dream Fierce', with good behavior rewarded with 'Making Magic Memories' trips out-with the community to widen horizons.

In a deprived area the availability of excellent astroturf pitches – with nets – was a huge carrot for youngsters. However, accessing programmes like 'Street Football in a Safe Place' required them to sign a player contract – devised by the young people – prohibiting swearing, bullying or fighting. If this is broken they are not banned – as this sent the wrong message – rather free play is only reinstated if they undertake ten hours volunteering, giving youth workers opportunities to discuss any problems they are having. Staff took communication very seriously and always acknowledge youngsters with a 'good morning' and 'how are you doing', while trying to 'catch them doing something right'. It was felt that showing genuine concern disorientated vulnerable youngsters because, as many interviewees commented, some parents struggle to articulate the love they had for their children. Spartans' blending of kindness and connection generated mutual respect amongst vulnerable youngsters who were suspicious of what Blackshaw & Long (2005) term 'the gaze' of distant state workers policing flawed consumers who, they felt, wanted to remove them from their families. The chief executive argued that 'one of the beautiful things about the organisation is that in the community it's seen as neutral and not part of the establishment'. There was a feeling that, at child planning meetings, Spartans' staff were the only supportive voices for the child which encouraged them to state their preferences, rather than have them articulated by professionals.

### **Managing the Hybrid Identity**

Doherty et al (2014) see attempts to obtain financial sustainability and social mission – what they term 'hybridity' – as 'the defining characteristic of social enterprises' (p.417), with some authors stressing inevitable trade-offs between these goals (Austin et al, 2006). Others, however, believe that delivering social objectives may be central to obtaining economic objectives that, in turn, aid the organisation's social goals (Wilson & Post, 2013). To deliver social value Spartans developed an innovative dental programme (Spartans Smilers) for local youth that used the process of dribbling a football through cones – the child's leg replicated a toothbrush and modified cones the teeth – to address poor local dental standards. To counter an absence of community police officers on Tuesday evenings they run an outreach 'Street Fitbaw' programme, where a mobile pitch tours 'crime hotspots' providing space for youth workers to interact with youngsters reluctant to travel to the Academy. They also run a FooTEA and multicultural FooTEA programme where, on Thursday and Friday evenings, youngsters are offered multisport activities and a hot meal giving further opportunities for youth workers to build trusting relationships. It was felt that this ignored the needs of youngsters not being adequately fed at the weekend, thus an AM Saturday Breakfast Club was initiated for those receiving free school meals. The source of these innovations was deemed to be 'smart individuals' leading the organisation, its small size, and location at the margins of public, commercial and voluntary sectors which facilitated creativity and a mindset not afraid to fail. Central to success was developing partnerships with like-minded individuals in the community, including a family member whose Olympic fencing success combined with an emphasis on learning through



setbacks, and more remote ‘network partners’ (Davies & Ryals, 2010), such as local headteachers, who believe in the value of informal educators.

With social enterprise funding prioritizing new projects over existing ones, Spartans used partnerships to deliver their social programmes. Centrally important is the desire to create the best ‘black tie’ charity dinner in Scotland. While the deviance surrounding professional football can undermine the organisation’s social goals – with local derby matches increasing youngsters’ likelihood of witnessing domestic violence which negatively affected their school mood – the dinner attracts wealthy footballers who are shown videos demonstrating Spartans’ social impact. Spartans’ relational ties extend to the Scotland football manager who was brought up locally. While youth workers use him as an example of what can be achieved through hard work, he also delivers media attention and links to affluent footballers and managers. This year the dinner raised over £200,000 for the organisation’s social programmes. However, as Doherty et al, 2014, p.425) remark, ‘Organisations that are difficult to categorize suffer disadvantages in terms of loss of legitimacy which...reduces access to resources’. This was evident here as they were deemed ‘too football’ to access youth work money’, and ‘too youth work focused’ to access football money. Their name also reduced legitimacy amongst local teachers who associated the ‘Academy’ with elite football. Their initial strapline ‘play together, live together, win together’ was also deemed to not articulate the organisation’s activities, leading to its replacement ‘Here for Good’.

Teasdale (2012, p.515) argues that, rather than conceptualise social enterprises as ‘win win’ solutions they are better seen as hybrids that try and combine third sector operational concerns (distinct social mission) with those of the private sector (market forces), creating tensions and trade-offs (Doherty et al, 2014) and strategies to offset them. Management grappled with the moral dilemma of paying staff the living wage - which befitted their social rationale – but realized this would mean employing fewer youth workers lessening the social impact. While all were welcome at Spartans there was a realization that early intervention was key because, as a senior practitioner remarked ‘sadly by the age of 12 it’s often too late for some youngsters’. While epitomizing the social enterprise ‘ethic of care’ unseen in other sectors (Amin, 2009), success led to criticism from established youth work providers who believed, as one interviewee remarked, ‘that we were stealing their kids’. Media and policy makers’ focus on the organisation’s ability to improve children’s lives ignores the long hours and stress facing senior management trying to blend social and financial goals and meet loan repayments. The social enterprise ‘image of goodness’ (Scott & Teasdale, 2012) meant Spartans attracted visits by SNP ministers keen to show a successful ‘Scottish way’ of doing business (Roy, 2014) requiring less government funding. However this threatened the organisation’s neutrality by being seen as an SNP project.

A key income source is the club’s 13 football teams who, as ‘anchor tenant’, pay a pitch hire rate lower than the commercial rate but higher than the community rate. Their involvement meant almost 50% of pitch bookings were accounted for which eased the organisation’s financial worries. Spartans’ ability to compete in the competitive leisure market was also helped by obtaining resources less available to other organisations. Central to these ‘resource transfers’ (Teasdale, 2012) was volunteering, with there being an expectation that Spartans’ football club members would volunteer at the Academy. This allowed the organisation to reduce costs and benefit from volunteer skills. The organisation’s social mission also made it attractive to local private sector companies keen

to demonstrate corporate social responsibility credentials. The private sector also provided Board members who gave free HR, legal and accountancy advice that would have been prohibitively expensive in the open market. Links between Spartans and financial institutions such as KPMG and EY are, in the organisation's narrative, extremely positive: being sponsors of the chief executive's Entrepreneur of the Year award and providers of Board expertise and volunteers. However a silent narrative relates to how the wider organisations facilitate some of the damaging mentalities of Britain's neoliberal Establishment, notably an encouragement of tax avoidance by the wealthy and a 'Because I'm worth it' ideology that exacerbates inequality, poor local services and social problems (Jones, 2014) that social enterprises seek to address. It could be argued that, rather than being non establishment, the 'feel-good' stories of individual change espoused by sport social enterprises are part of how the neoliberal Establishment 'get away with it' (Jones, 2014).

## **Contribution to Local Education**

### **Youth Worker in Primary Schools**

The Academy operates a Youth Worker in Primary School programme and an 'Alternative School' intervention for secondary school pupils struggling with mainstream education. In the former, three youth workers work for one day a week in three local primaries whose headteachers embraced their informal educator approach. The latter felt the curriculum did not meet some pupils' needs with resilience, self-esteem and ambition neglected, and children needed more opportunities to achieve. Teachers' stricter professional boundaries was said to reduce their connection to some children, with youth workers enabling this as they had no 'teacher tone', rather 'spoke the pupils' language' and had their respect from being seen in the community over many years. The ability of sporting interventions to reach boys with behavioural issues (Long et al, 2002) was evident here with headteachers stressing how youth workers provided 'strong male role models' for young boys who lacked this in the home and community. Why this happens is not fully explored in the organisation's dominant narrative. The timing of the primary school intervention was important, with those working on a Monday informing teachers of issues 'bubbling under the surface' of the community, while being there to take some pupils away from the classroom – to engage in sport or just rake the school sandpit - who struggled with family issues occurring over the weekend. A headteacher remarked that local poverty brought child protection issues which, if it was not for youth workers, would fall on teachers who were unaware of what the child was coping with when arriving at school. These pupils were offered sport at the end of the day in return for good behavior during intervening classes. Referring again to Blackshaw & Long's (2006) point about community sport workers bridging cultural divides, youth workers acted as 'go-betweens' between vulnerable pupils and the school because, as one headteacher commented, 'being cool in the community meant pupils open-up to them which gives them a calm start to the week'. The youth workers' credibility meant they were not seen as 'workers' like other 'workers' in the pupils' lives who were deemed a source of anxiety. Headteachers used youth workers to bridge academic and non-academic subjects by using their 'cool respect' to 'make reading cool'. Having the joy of reading communicated by teachers would be expected by pupils but, coming from youth workers, was said to deliver greater impact. Having youth workers in the playground also contributed to some pupils managing their emotions better, with playground games ending acrimoniously quelled quickly and informally by their calming influence. They were also involved in easing the transition from primary to secondary school for youngsters whose family had a negative reputation locally and who were stigmatized by some within schools as 'troublemakers' and, potentially, not worthy

of attention.

### **Alternative Education through Growth Mindset and Grit?**

Spartans' approach mirrors Long et al's (2002, p.232) point that 'the broader significance of sport for many young people enables it to attract educational under achievers to educational environments in which they have the opportunity to raise their level of educational achievement'. Its 'Alternative School' intervention – aimed at those either excluded or at risk of exclusion from secondary school - benefitted from factors underpinning successful sport and education interventions, notably small group work and one to one mentoring that allowed pupils to 'open-up' within a very informal and supportive environment (Sharp et al, 2003). As one pupil commented 'here I'm not treated like a pupil, I'm made to feel like family'. The intervention – which runs for three half days per week - provides necessary breaks from sedentary classroom activities (Lindner, 1999) by (say) taking pupils, who struggle to maintain concentration, onto the 3G pitches for quizzes using information on the surrounding advertising hoardings. The youth work space allowed classes to begin with table tennis then punctuated with games of pool and Xbox giving the relaxed learning context that underpinned their 'building a bridge of trust model'. However what is interesting to me, as a critical friend of Spartans, is that their underlying 'philosophy' revolves around Professor Carol Dweck's Growth Mindset and Professor Angela Duckworth's 'Grit' ideas. The emphasis on the 'psychology of success' in both creates a focus on self-reflection, personal development, hard work, persistence and learning from failure. This ignores that, in a society 'rigged to favour the middle classes' (Jones, 2011), pupils could work hard but not succeed, with the emphasis on personal responsibility sending a negative message to disadvantaged youngsters who are punished for damaging social arrangements beyond their control, while also allowing schools to maintain an unimaginative curriculum and limited support and society to abdicate responsibility for addressing their disadvantage (Kohn, 2014). The downplaying of external factors within Dweck and Duckworth's 'pop psychology' (Denby, 2016) – and the organisation's desire to reach the 'silent choir' and 'save' some pupils 'from a path of no return' - mirrors the quasi-religious, individualising optimistic script of social enterprise (Dey & Steyaert, 2010) and the wider 'self-delusion' that the successful earn rewards from their efforts, reducing support for the welfare state through tax avoidance and fostering damaging visions of the deserving and undeserving poor (Jones, 2011).

The popularity of 'grit' teaching, especially for poor children, chimes with the politics of austerity by fitting the political right's desire 'to not only individualise responsibility for social conditions and life chances but emphasise promises of subjective control and agency where the individual body and mind become loci of control in the service of what Giroux terms 'the disimagination machine'' (Saltman, 2014, p.44). The aforementioned author criticizes the values within Duckworth's Grit scale for strengthening the class hierarchy by teaching working class youngsters that their alienation is an individual failing, not a function of social engineering and an economy that needs their submission to authority and current power relations. Duckworth's (2016) contention that 'those who defy the odds are especially gritty' (p.11) ignores how the odds are stacked against those at the bottom of the class hierarchy – what Savage (2015) terms the 'precariat' - and need changed. Denby (2016) views the Grit scale – encompassing grit, self-control, zest, optimism, social intelligence, gratitude and curiosity - as 'morally timid and empty', with the 'character' developed perfect for 'producing corporate drones in a capitalist economy'. As he argues, grit 'mystifies the social sources of individual alienation, biologising and naturalizing class inequality'. Saltman (2014) argues that grit supporters are excited about 'addressing the

stress of poverty, not by reducing or ending poverty and all its violence, but by teaching children to channel the stress produced by poverty by learning how to endure drudgery' (p.51).

It is not surprising that the organisation's optimistic and 'can do' social entrepreneurs embrace Dweck's 'simple idea about the brain' because, as mentioned earlier, they were 'about doing it rather than theory'. Dweck's focus on psychology over sociology sees people 'differing' because of 'background' not class, while the role of societal inequality in making people constantly assess whether 'I feel like a winner or a loser' is ignored, with references only made to teachers' 'judgemental stance' (p.6). Like 'grit' the focus is on what children can achieve through 'years of passion, toil and training...even when it is not going well' (p.12). Like grit teaching, critics question whether disadvantaged youngsters are being taught to not question damaging social forces causing their predicament. They must appreciate the damaging role of politics and societal values informing what Dweck (2015) describes as 'the framework of judge and be judged' (p.246), moving analysis beyond merely 'learning about the brain' (p.216). The Growth Mindset wrongly stresses the need to 'fix kids' rather than 'fix the system', with the focus on individual effort aligning with our neoliberal hegemony which emphasises grades and competition between pupils over learning, ignoring the need to change 'toxic' structural arrangements negatively influencing mindsets of teachers towards pupils and their parents, and limiting disadvantaged pupils' horizons (Disappointed Idealist, 2014).

Sport is central to Dweck's book – where successful athletes are described as having a growth mindset par excellence – and Duckworth's – which includes a section titled 'The Playing Fields of Grit'. Both offer uncritical accounts of sport in society where success is attributed to individual effort. The damaging impact of societal inequality on individual psychology (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009) is ignored in Duckworth's research on the 'psychology of success' where 'situations and personality traits' are (merely) reciprocally 'calling each other' (p.233). Her psychological research ignores fundamental questions about culture which, as she states, 'shapes our being'. However, to her, this does not mean 'geographic or political boundaries that divide one people from another as much as the invisible psychological boundaries separating us from them' (p.244). Mirroring Wilkinson & Pickett (2009) and Jones (2011) this paper sees the two as inextricably linked. Damaging political processes and social arrangements are ignored in preference for 'self-imposed limits' and, even when advocating caution, Duckworth's theorizing is more notable for what is left unspoken. She admits that 'grit' is not central to individual character as 'in studies of how people size up others morality trumps all other aspects of character' (p.273). Again, the role of inequality and society's market values is ignored with their entrance into people's very fibre (McKenzie, 2015; 2015; Sandel, 2012) dismissed by references to 'grit' being 'in the guts'.

## **Conclusion**

This paper extends critical social enterprise scholarship by highlighting unspoken tensions within the positive grand narrative. It advances social enterprise study by interrogating data from qualitative research with critical literature on social enterprise and also sport and inclusion. While not hearing from users and the community is a research gap, examining 'the process whereby the venture unfolds' (Corner & Ho, 2010, p.636) highlights strengths and limitations to aid theoretical understanding and practical operations.

Mechanisms driving the case study's success mirror Stephan's (2016) thoughts on how social enterprises drive 'deep level social change'. Change was deemed a slow process in which Spartans' role may not be appreciated by youngsters for many years, making evaluation problematic. Key was a safe and welcoming environment which recognised young people's 'different maps of the world' and the need to 'honour uniqueness'. Reflecting Haudenhuyse et al's (2012) point about young people needing to feel successful, staff sought to catch participants 'doing things right' and find their '10 out of 10 moment'. Of central importance was the chief executive's and chairman's previous life experience – their 'experience corridors' (Corner & Ho, 2010) - that wanted to 'give something back' to the community with profit seen as beyond individual gain. The former's ability to spend 18 months in the community appreciating local needs and obtaining ownership was vital and may be unavailable to aspiring social enterprises. While social enterprise literature often stresses 'hero male entrepreneurs' his family's support during this and later endeavours involving long stressful hours needs appreciated. While Ratten (2011a) rightly argues that social entrepreneurship is an opportunity for sport entrepreneurs, these long hours – often for little if any pay - can negatively impact on their work / life balance (Dempsey & Sanders, 2010). It may also encourage successful social enterprises to be led by men without childcare roles (Teasdale et al, 2011). Mirroring views of what makes successful social enterprises (Steiner & Teasdale, 2016), key to Spartans' success was a leadership team whose business acumen and social compassion combined effectively with access to business, sporting and community contacts and an ability to articulate positive stories about their social programmes verbally and via social media. This gained funders' trust and generated income streams to finance the community work. It has been argued that shifting one's research focus from the role of social capital in cultural environments that aid entrepreneurship highlights the 'supporting role' of cultural capital (Light & Dana, 2013, p.616). This study confirms this as, mirroring other 'sport for development' studies (Crabbe, 2007; Haudenhuyse et al, 2012), social impact was aided by recruiting particular locals as youth workers as their shared cultural capital – notably their challenging background and social class - provided the credibility needed to develop trusting relationships with vulnerable youngsters and encourage different life choices. The chief executive's cultural capital enabled a connection to a local gang leader - deemed a cultural architect – to make volunteering 'cool'. Rewarding good behavior with trips outside the community and having creative solutions towards negative behaviour were also key organisational practices. Establishing 'quick wins' and embedding evaluation in all programmes – using techniques recognising youngsters' preferred language – also encouraged perceptions of success. While articulating this to some funders was deemed overly bureaucratic, having others who trusted their delivery approach lessened 'philosophical or strategic conflicts' (Wilson & Post, 2013, p.729). Rather than emphasise 'hero social entrepreneurs' this study captures the importance of developing a team of staff and volunteers - and collaborations with like-minded partners - to blend social and financial objectives. This facilitated risk taking from a position of relative safety and support.

However, social enterprise 'win win' rhetoric ignores how they produce compromises and trade-offs between competing institutional logics (Mullins et al, 2012). Spartans would love to end poverty in North Edinburgh but, as a business, they must be financially sustainable and thus make trade-offs over who to focus on – catching youngsters by aged 12 was crucial – with 'alternative school' referrals shifting towards those interested in sport. Their hybrid identity facilitated 'resource transfers' (Teasdale, 2010) from individuals (donations and volunteering) and private companies (Board members and CSR activities) that aided competitiveness. However this attracted criticisms from other youth agencies and football clubs jealous of their success. Tensions also arose over not paying staff the

living wage, whether they were being seen as an SNP project, and how to communicate their identity when their name encouraged perceptions of elite football not social change. Their 'non-establishment' nature is somewhat undermined by an education philosophy underpinned by Dweck's Growth Mindset and Duckworth's Grit pop psychology. While these authors' focus on hard work and learning through failure has some relevance, it blames disadvantaged pupils for the education system's failure to offer an imaginative curriculum and necessary support. There is a silent narrative that, for some schools, Spartans' 'Alternative School' may provide a dumping ground for 'problematic' pupils who, having had expectations raised with personalised education and compassionate support at the Academy, return to an unchanged education system accentuating their anxiety. While it is argued that social entrepreneurship 'involves cooperative relationships in which resources are exchanged to create beneficial value for all parties' (Ratten & Welp, 2011, p.283) it needs stressed that, here, the local government did not fund the programme possibly because – like other 'sport for development' initiatives involving social enterprise (Hayhurst, 2014) - they get development 'on the cheap'. Social problems in deprived communities will not be solved by innovative business models and charismatic social entrepreneurs. To some extent the fashion for social enterprise represents another triumph of neoliberalism as the case study's emphasis on poverty of aspiration, self-improvement and 'doing it over theory' ignores how the wider political context creates the local problems they seek to address. The ability of the organisation's values to form a 'moral compass' ignores the deeper malaise within contemporary market society – including professional sport – where widening inequality, cultural marginalisation and 'the marketization of everything' damages people's moral values and commonality (Sandel, 2012, p.203). While Ratten (2011b) stresses how the sports marketing discipline gives a foundation for appreciating how entrepreneurship is manifest via innovation, proactiveness and risk-taking behavior, the use of sociology provides a deeper – less individualistic - understanding of who can undertake such apparently positive practices and the winners and losers in this political process. It encourages an embrace of the 'dark side of social enterprise' (Brandsen, 2016) – its tensions and failures - to shift from the current focus on celebrity support and inspirational individual successes. Questioning social enterprise supporters with theory will encourage awkward but necessary conversations about the politics silenced by the positive grand narrative. Using a quote from Wilkinson & Pickett's (2009, p.26) seminal 'Spirit Level' analysis of the impact of widening inequality, Coalter (2013) gives a 'salutary warning' to sport for development providers when stating 'even when the various services are successful in stopping someone reoffending, getting someone off drugs or dealing with educational failure, we know that our societies are endlessly recreating these problems in each new generation'. There is a danger that, like resilience studies, social enterprises stress the 'rare individual' who prospers despite family breakdown, violence, drugs and poverty (Saltman, 2014, p.52) leaving the odds stacked against the community. However, rather than wait for a 'democratic revolution' against neoliberalism (Jones, 2014), Spartans help the 'someone' in the above quote as it matters to them. This chimes with Cho's (2006, p.52) pertinent remark that, to social enterprise supporters, they should intervene to 'assist those in need rather than sacrifice them for the sake of attracting attention to the need for social change'.

The study highlights many areas for further research. First, it needs assessed whether the long working hours, use of resource-rich social networks and need to articulate entrepreneurial stories verbally and via social media privileges white, male middle class social entrepreneurs (Steiner & Teasdale, 2016). With entrepreneurs' background influencing their view of opportunities (Ratten, 2011a) it needs examined whether this prioritises local problems facing males not females. Second, examining sport social

enterprises in different geographical locations could explore whether local culture creates different attitudes to 'social' and 'enterprise'. Third, examining sport social enterprises in deprived estates could assess whether they encourage 'class-mixing' in opposition to trends within market society (Sandel, 2012).

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